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## “Kibbutz Buchenwald” in Geringshof / Lecture by Yoav Gad, September 2023

Today I stand before you here as representative of the second generation of Shoa survivors. I, Yoav Gad, stand here on behalf of my father, Ehud Herbert Growald, who was one of the leaders of the Jewish HeChalutz (pioneer) movement in Germany at the Berlin head office. He was a leading instructor and manager in the Hachsharot (training facilities) of HeChalutz in Ahrensdorf and Neuendorf. He was deported together with 117 of his trainees from Neuendorf to Auschwitz on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1943. He was finally liberated when he was in the Bergenbelsen KZ on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945. He died in Israel on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007. (25.2.1914-19.4.2007)

I, Yoav Growald – Gad, was born on 18.2.1949 already in the State of Israel. For 23 years I served as a pilot in the Israeli Air Force. I then spent 23 years volunteering in organizations taking care of youths in need. (We call them Youth Having a Chance.)

In August 1945, my father arrived at the Geringshof farm and joined the “Kibbutz Buchenwald”. He stayed there until July 1947 when he legally immigrated to the Land of Israel, which was then under the British Mandate.

The founders of the kibbutz chose Geringshof because it was outside the area of the Russian Red Army Zone. The place was in the American Zone. The founders of the Kibbutz settled in Geringshof because it was a larger farm with more spacious buildings. The Geringshof farm had already been a Hachshara training site of the HeChalutz movement and in Jewish ownership before the Second World War.

When the founders first arrived in Geringshof they discovered in the attic of the barn a Torah scroll in a large box. On the wall above it there was a sentence written in Hebrew: “Think about us from time to time.” It was a reminder of the members of the group B.C.D – Brit Chalutzim Datiyim (the Covenant of the Religious Pioneers), who were deported to be killed in 1943.

The specific site was chosen among other things for the purpose to serve as a transit station for surviving Jews who were throughout Europe and in Germany on their way to illegally

immigrate to the Land of Israel. It was called 'illegal' because the British authorities did not give every Jew a permit (Certificate) to come to Israel. Therefore, at any point in time there were in Geringshof a few dozen young Jewish men and women, who stayed either for a few days or sometimes up to two years there.

In total, during the years 1945-1948 about 10,000 people went through Geringshof.

The place became once again an agricultural farm having cows, horses, livestock, and fields of different crops. From time-to-time groups left in trucks heading to the port of Marseille, from where they continued to the Land of Israel in small ships, which the Jewish "Mossad for Aliya B" (the forerunner of the Israeli Mossad in the time before the State of Israel became independent) and the organization ("HaBricha", the escape) bought and operated.

The first people to arrive in Geringshof on 3.6.1945 were members of the religious Zionist youth movements, led by Ezekiel Tidor and people of the HeChalutz Hachsharot groups from Germany headed by Artur Poznanski. Ezekiel Tidor had been in the Geringshof Hachshara facility already before the Second World War started. He survived five years of being in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. Later, a wide range of people arrived there with or without a Zionist movement background.

Garsfeld was a small, neglected site with no livestock and lacking any maintenance. In contrast, Geringshof was a large place managed by a German farm manager. The farm had livestock and cultivated agricultural fields as well as basic agricultural equipment. There was a clear need for people to repair, maintain and transport basic equipment, food and agricultural tools. Organized groups and individual people continued to arrive from time to time. The founders of the Kibbutz and the community leaders were Ezekiel Tidor, Artur Poznanski, Herbert Growald, Pize Simcha, Simcha Diamant, Isidor (Papa) Jocker, Rivka Engelrad (later to become the wife of Aharon Bacia), Aharon Bacia, Israel Lerner, Avraham Gottlieb (later called Ahuvia) and Jewish leaders from outside the community such as Rabbi Herschel Schechter and Rabbi Reuven Marcus, both from the U.S. Army.

At the beginning, mainly men were arriving. As a result, the community lacked women in order to maintain some social balance and also for the purpose of maintaining the facility. For this reason some group members were sent to Fulda in order to find and bring a female reinforcement to the Hachshara in Geringshof. And indeed, they were successful.

Over time, the Hachshara at Geringshof had agricultural equipment, cows, horses, chickens and pigs, agricultural fields and a large forest all around. The facility manager was Isidor (Papa) Jocker, who was a dominant and energetic figure, and a knowledgeable person. Many visitors came to the farm after having heard about it far away from American and British officers and from leaders of Jewish communities.

There was a shortage of money in order to run and maintain the facility, to pay for food, clothing, agricultural equipment etc. Financial support came from various sources such as from Rabbi Schechter, who represented the U.S. Army, from the military governor of Fulda, Lieutenant Finkelstein, who was very supportive, from soldiers of the British Jewish Brigade, from Jewish soldiers of the U.S. Army, from the Jewish JOINT Organization, the Jewish Agency and UNRWA. Lieutenant Finkelstein, as the governor of the Fulda district was the one who gave the Hachshara group the permit to use the Geringshof farm.

At the beginning of the Kibbutz there were two “camps”: the religious people of the Agudat Israel, and the secular veterans of the Hachsharot HeChalutz. Later, there was a further split between German born and Polish born members. Then another split took place between the younger members and the veteran members. People also distinguished between Zionists and others who only understood the place as a transit station.

Nevertheless, as a result of the end of the war, the Shoa survivors had no home to return to. Friendships and cooperations were created very often. Already at the beginning of 1946, 4 marriages took place in Geringshof. Among them were my parents, who were married June 9<sup>th</sup> 1946. Many friendships evolved later to marriages of which families grew and immigrated to Israel and lived there ever since.

In July 1948, the Geringshof Hachshara was closed. Most people immigrated to Israel illegally. Only a minority of the Kibbutz Buchenwald group from Geringshof received the British Certificates. This small Kibbutz Buchenwald group founded Israel in June 1948 the “Kibbutz Buchenwald” on a farm between Rishon LeZion and Rehovot, which was called the Spun farm. In 1917, the Spun farm was conquered by the British general Allenby during the First World War, when the British conquered Palestine from the Ottoman Empire, and later received the mandate from the League of Nations to govern it. In 1949, the Kibbutz name was changed to Kibbutz Netzer. Netzer means in Hebrew a sprout or a shoot. In June 1955, the Knesset, the Israeli parliament approved to rename the Kibbutz as Kibbutz Netzer Sereni commemorating Enzo Sereni, who had been a Jewish volunteer parachutist in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army. He parachuted over Italy for the purpose of rescuing Jews from the Holocaust, and was caught by the German Nazis, and deported to Dachau where he was executed.

Among the founding members of Kibbutz Buchenwald/Kibbutz Netzer Sereni were Hilde Greenbaum, later Hilde Simcha, who had been a trainee of my father when he was an instructor in Ahrensdorf and Neuendorf, leading the group also in Auschwitz, Bergen Belsen and Geringshof. Hilde Simcha was the one to arrange for my father to again meet Ilse Loewenstein, who had been his fiancée already since 1938 when they met at lake Wannsee. After the meeting his fiancé in Fulda, Herbert took her to Geringshof where they married on 9.6.1946.

Hilde Simcha lives since 1948 in Kibbutz Netzer Sereni to this day, having children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, who all live in the Kibbutz. Hilde's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday is on 31.8.2023!

Allow me to add on a personal note: it is well known that the generation of our parents did not share and did not tell almost anything about their experiences in the Shoa. Maybe they did it in order to protect us their children from the memories of that past. I personally heard about the Geringshof Hachshara and about "Kibbutz Buchenwald" many times. In 1966, I visited with my parents my uncle Leo (Leopold) and aunt Buby (Scharlotte) Danziger, who lived since 1945 in Hattenhof for the rest of their lives.. The visit took place upon the invitation of my father, who wanted the relatives to be close to him. The meeting in 1966 was to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of Leo. I got from him as a present a complete painting set. I took it and went to the nearby hill to paint the landscape. Only 30 years later my father told me that the landscape which I had painted was the Geringshof Hachshara farm. I tell you this anecdote in order to illustrate to what extent our parents, the generation of the Shoa survivors avoided to tell their children about their past. My father was an only son, I am an only son, and my daughter is an only child as well...

Today I lead and manage an association, which I have founded, that commemorates the heritage of the Hachsharot HeChalutz in Germany. We focus on collecting information and communicating the legacy of the Hachsharot HeChalutz using modern media. We have about 120 members, people from the first, second, third and fourth generation. The name of our association is: "Hachsharot HeChalutz in Germany 1933-1947 / the following generations".

We have an internet website in Hebrew, German and English, containing a substantial amount of historic documents and pictures. Four people from the founding generation of the Hachsharot HeChalutz have already received the notable recognition of the badge of "Jews who Rescued a Jew". This Bnei Brit badge is similar to the Yad Vashem badge of "The Righteous Among the Nations" for non-Jews who rescued Jews during the Holocaust while risking their own lives. The four who have been recognized by Bnei Brit as recipients of the badge of "Jews who rescued a Jew" are my father, Ehud Herbert Growald, Alex Moch, the director of the Neuendorf Hachshara, Isaak Isi Phillip and Ezekil Tidor. To this day already 622 Jews have been recognized by Bnai Brith to receive the badge of "A Jew who rescued Jews". Most of them were recognized posthumously. On August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023 also Alma Rose was recognized to receive the badge. She was the leader, conductor and manager of the Auschwitz women orchestra and was murdered on 4.4.1944 in Auschwitz. This recognition came just in time 2 weeks before the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Hilde Simcha who played violin in this orchestra.

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH and SHALOM. COME TO ISRAEL AND SEE THE PLACE WE HAVE BUILT.**